



# The Buckeye Airlifter



The 179th Airlift Wing, Ohio Air National Guard, Mansfield, OH

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## Unit choir is possibly first in the Guard

**By: Staff Sgt. Shannon Parks**  
**179th Public Affairs Office**

Over the roar of the C-130 engines their voices sing the songs of freedom. Their songs commemorate fallen heroes, ring true with American pride and move audiences throughout the state. They are the members of the 179<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Choir.

Their jobs vary in scope and skill, but they share a common voice led by Col. Willis Waldron, Support Group commander. Waldron, with more than 15 years of experience with the Mansfield Symphony Chorus, organized the choir in October 2001 with a mere seven choristers.

The choir now consists of more than 18 choristers from various areas in the wing.

"We are a mix of full time and traditional members. What a great way to come together as a diverse team," Waldron said.

The choir has increased in popularity since its inception in late 2001; and is currently the only known formalized Air National Guard choir in the country. Their events include the Let Freedom Reign ceremony at the Renaissance Theater in downtown Mansfield on Sept. 11, 2002, the Governor's Annual Memorial Day Wreath Laying event at the Ohio Statehouse, the Ohio Veteran's Hall of Fame Class of 2002 Induction ceremony and the unit annual awards banquet.

It is no surprise the choir is regularly asked to perform. Recently, Senior Master Sgt. Scott Sparks asked Waldron, "What are the chances that you have a recording of the national

anthem?" Sparks explained the rendition brought tears to his eyes and his wife asked him to get a copy of the choir singing it.

While there is no set schedule to produce a demo tape, the group does plan to continue with their performance schedule and all are committed to keep the group singing for the long term.

"Our hopes for the group are high, stratospheric," Waldron said. Waldron wants to see the choir perform at Air National Guard conventions and work closely with the color and honor guards. Members of the choir enjoy performing and are called upon often to volunteer their talents, however they are careful to balance their commitments. "All of our people maintain busy schedules, for now we're trying not to overbook," Waldron said.

Senior Master Sgt. Richard Schuller, Security Forces Squadron first sergeant, is one of those busy vocalists. Although he is responsible for the morale and welfare of more than 80 troops he makes time for the choir. "I think it is important to represent our base in a positive way. I feel like I'm giving something back," he said.

Like Schuller, Master Sgt. April Roberts, recruiter, juggles a busy schedule but is committed to promoting the Ohio Air National Guard through song. "I am so proud when I go out there and sing in that uniform," she said. Roberts looks forward to future engagements and



*Members of the 179th choir sing during the Let Freedom Reign program.*

found the Air Force choir that sang at the championship Fiesta Bowl inspirational. "I thought to myself 'we could do that.'"

And with the choir's "stratospheric" goals, they just might one day.

### Name the Choir

The 179th choir is looking for an official name and would like to get unit member's input.

If you have an idea or suggestion, please submit it to the PA Office before May 1, 2003.

The winner will be named in the Buckeye Airlifter and will receive a special gift.